(iii)

The Triumph of the Economic Virtues

" One beam in a dark place/' wrote one who knew the travail of the spirit, " hath exceeding much refreshment in it. Blessed beJJi^nai^^r^shjningjiigon so dark a heart asjpine.[11] ᴹ While the revelation of God to the individual soul is the centre..of all religion, the essence of Puritan theology was that it made it, not only the centre, but the whole circumfereng^and substance, dismissing as dross and vanity all else but this secret and solitary communion. Grace alone can save, and this grace is the direct jgftjpf God, unmediated by any earthly institution. The elect cannot by any act of their own evoke it ; but they can prepare their hearts to receive it, and cherish it when received. They will prepare them best, if they empty them of all that "may disturb the intentness of their lonely vigil. Like an engineer, who, to canalize the rush of the oncoming tide, dams all channels save that through which it is to pour, like a painter who makes light visible by plunging all that is not light in gloom, the Puritan attunes his heart to the voice from Heaven by an immense effort of concentration and abnegation. To win all, he re-nounces all. When earthly props have been cast down, the soul stands erect in the presence of God. Infinity is attained by a process of subtraction. *****

To a vision thus absorbed in a single intense experience, not only religious and ecclesiastical systems, but the entire world of human relations, the whole fabric of social institutions, witnessing in all the wealth of their idealism and their greed to the infinite creativeness of man, reveal themselves in a new and wintry light, The fire of the spirit burns brightly on the hearth ; but through the windows of his soul the Puritan, unless a poet or a saint, looks on a landscape touched by no breath of spring. What he sees is a forbidding and frost-bound wilderness, rolling its snow-clad leagues